

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: LUCY RIVERA
INTERVIEWER: PAUL PAGE
DATE: JUNE 25, 1986**

**P = PAUL
L = LUCY**

Tape 86.20

P: ... Rivera. My name is Paul Page. And we'll be talking about your life here in Lowell and what brought you here, and your family today, up to today.

L: Okay. My parents brought us to Lowell, my brother and I. He was in the Army, and he was stationed at Fort Devens. Since we couldn't find an apartment on base, my father decided to come to Lowell and look for an apartment, which he did, and he found it on Chelmsford Street. And the building was called Sandra Gable, which is now where the Burger King stands. We lived there I believe it was maybe three or four years in that apartment house.

P: Did your parents live in the United States for a long time?

L: Okay. When we, we came to Lowell in 1956. After living four years there in Sandra Gables, we moved to Hale Street, 212 Hale Street to be exact. The building doesn't exist anymore it was torn down.

P: Was this for urban renewal?

L: I believe so, because they're making a very nice apartment house over there, like a duplex.

P: Oh yah! What street was that on?

L: Hale Street, corner of Washington and Hale Street.

P: I don't think (--) I might know it by sight.

L: So anyway my father continued in the service until 1965. In 1965 he retired after 22 years. After travelling to other states he says the best place to live was Lowell. I mean there was employment, and he was very satisfied with the education that we had. So he went (--) We moved from Hale Street at that time, and they moved back to Concord Street in 1965. And 1965 we continued to live there until 1970. That's when I got married. I mean all through these years I attended the public schools here in Lowell, and until 1970 when I got married and moved on.

P: What kind of job did your father do?

L: Well my father, when he retired in 1965 he looked for a job at New Knit on Nottingham Street. He worked as a shipper and receiver for around fifteen years there. Something that I forgot to mention, my mother found a job at New Knit too. She was a stitcher there. So there were, so this was the place to be. "We both have a job and we are satisfied with everything. So we are going to stay here in Lowell."

P: Where do your parents (--) Did your parents come from, what country?

L: They came from Puerto Rico, and I was born in Puerto Rico too.

P: Oh were you. So do you remember anything about your life there?

L: Very little because I left when I was very young. But I have gone back you know, since I have been in the states. I've been back four or five times, and I've visited my relatives there, which I still have. My parents moved back to Puerto Rico. (P: Oh really) Yah, in 1979 they moved back. Bought a home and they're both retired now.

P: So is that something that a lot of, shall I (--) Well is the goal eventually to move back to Puerto Rico for many people, or would they rather (--)

L: Some people, I think, have that kind of hope to go back to Puerto Rico. Like my husband, he would like to go, but I personally, I've lived here in the states so many years that I'm Americanized. You know, I just like the American way of life. I just, you know, I like the states. I don't want to go back.

P: How is the American way of life different from what you find in Puerto Rico?

L: Well like I said I never lived there to really know. I went to school here, and after I graduated I went and found myself a job, and I've have been working since.

P: But let's say you were to go back to live there, from what you've notice, how would you consider living in the States different from possibly living there?

L: First of all the temperature, it's always warm. Employment is not very good over there. So there's a chance that you won't be able to find a job, and then you have to look

for other sources. I just don't think of going back there. So I haven't put a lot of thought to that.

P: But you know Spanish well enough to (--)

L: I speak fluent Spanish, English, and some Portuguese.

P: What kind of job do you do now?

L: Presently, I am a personnel assistant at Wang in Methuen. Before that, I was a case worker at the International Institute for twelve years. I worked in Lowell. Prior to that I worked for the Spanish-American Center four years.

P: You were in, in the International Institute you were a case worker?

L: That's correct.

P: You mean (--) Now were you trying to help reunite families?

L: That's what I mostly did. When the Spanish people came in, and they knew that the Institute existed, they would go there and ask us to find them apartments and help get them set up. We didn't really have to do any family (P: Reunification) reunification, because when they were, when they arrived here in Lowell it was someone, a relative, like a spouse, or a family calling them. So I did a lot of casework. I worked for the Spanish community sixteen years.

P: And what did you consider, what did you see as being the most difficult problem for Spanish people first coming here?

L: Housing. Housing was number one. I mean they, sometimes the apartments were too small. And if they found that was they're, you know, the size they wanted the rents would be too high.

P: You were saying that housing was a (--)

L: That housing was the biggest problem. You know, the apartments were many times too expensive. And I can speak for these people that they were discriminated very much. When they found an apartment they really liked they would be turned away with different excuses, because I had the same experience. I was looking for an apartment in I think it was 1972. I don't have an accent. And I saw an ad in the paper that they had an apartment. I was looking for an apartment. And I called and they said, "Sure, come on down." So I did go down and looked at the apartment. I really liked it. But the lady, you know, she kind of, was kind of a little rude-like, you know. So I says, "I'm very much interested in the apartment." She said, "Well okay, we'll let you know in a couple of days." So a couple of days went by, and I called her and she said, "I'm sorry, it's been rented." I says, "Okay, fine," but two days later in the paper again. She said, "Well the

people before you, they just decided they didn't want the apartment." I says, "Well why didn't you call me," because I was really interested and they had no excuse. So I had the personal experience that you do get discriminated. Many times we have to pay the price for maybe, maybe one or two people who are you know, troublemakers. We pay the price.

P: And you just have to forget it.

L: No, that's it. So I did find an apartment after that. I'm very happy to say that eight years ago we, my husband being a veteran from Vietnam, we were able to buy a house, and here we are. We don't have to go through the embarrassment of being turned down.

P: You were saying you worked at a Spanish (--)

L: American Center.

P: Well what is that?

L: It was an agency where we helped the Spanish people. And that was on Lee Street, where St. Joseph's Shrine is. It was down like in the cellar. They fixed it up and that's where we had out offices. There was two priests, Fr. Dube and Fr. Brunelle, and they kind of ran the organization. I was their secretary, but at the same time I would do odds and ends like taking care of claims and translations. Our headquarters were there until 1970. In 1970 they came and bought the Spanish-American Center on Gorham Street, which is across the street from the Butler School. They bought that building. It's a church right next to the fire house.

P: I don't seem to remember it.

L: Yah, it's right across the Butler, yah.

P: Oh yah, well I think I just rode my bicycle down. See I'm really not familiar with this area at all, and I have a hell of a time. It's like another world. I mean I'm just started to learn about it last year.

L: Yah, that's the Spanish American Center.

P: I don't mean to say, when I say it is like another world, but I mean it's not like (--)
It's just, it's just a part of the city I never was, I was never in. And it sort of (--)
And so all of the streets are very strange. You know, none of the names I've ever heard before.
So it's because of where I've lived, and I always use to stay in that, that area of the city.
There's, you know, there's that feeling about Lowell that it's really, I don't know if it's segregated, but it seems to be like it's segregated anyways. So you were saying that the (--).

L: Right. So the Spanish American Center, I worked there until 1972. In 1972 that's when I joined the International Institute staff and I did case work there for a few years.

P: Now when you were denied a place to stay, you were working at the International Institute.

L: At that time, yes.

P: How does the International Institute deal with these problems?

L: Well I was the one that worked with the Spanish people. Sometimes I would confront the owners and ask them for a good (--) You know, they would say, "Well it's been rented." I says, "Well you know, these people are desperately looking for an apartment. I wish, you know, you could do something for them." You know, and I would explain the serious situation they were in, but they, they had, they wouldn't give in. They would just say, "It's rented. It's rented." I ran into that a lot of times.

P: So what do you do then in that case?

L: Well I manage to call other places, and I would end up getting something for them, an apartment.

P: Good or bad, or?

L: Sometimes they were kind of bad, and some were (--) I couldn't (--) There were a few good ones, but most of the places were just run down places, and the people themselves would have to fix them up. Most of the time when they found an apartment it was because some Hispanic people were living there. So, you know, they wouldn't, it would be landlords that really (--) Like Spanos rented out a lot of apartments to the Spanish. Silva Brothers did too. I found that these privately owned apartments by other people were the ones that really would give them a hard time. But the big landlords like Silva and Spanos, they really did not care who they rented out too I would say. I mean they would screen them and everything, but I mean they weren't that picky about it.

P: What is it about the Spanish that the landlords don't like, do you know?

L: I don't know, they seem to think that, it's not very nice to say this but they go to certain parts of the city and they see the dirty streets, and garbage thrown all over the place, and they think that they were all the same. And then that's not so. Like you're here in my house and (--)

P: And I can attest that's nicer than my house.

L: And there's a lot, a lot, a lot of us like this. A lot of people have a thing about the Hispanics that (--) And I can understand there's some that are trouble makers, but you can't judge them all for maybe a few rotten ones. And this is the way I feel. And a lot of

times I speak when they start putting the Puerto Ricans down, because I've always worked. My husband has always worked. He was in the armed forces of the United States. His family, they all work. My brother works, and I have a lot of friends who worked for a living. And they all seem to I don't know, they have this thing that we all come here to get welfare. We're over here to take away what they have, and that's not so. That isn't so. We're here to make a living too. Like I say, but there's a few on the welfare budget. There's people of all nationalities on it, not only the Hispanics, but they always seem to be pointing out us.

P: You know when they use the term Hispanic it seems like they're grouping a lot of Spanish, or you know, Spanish speaking people together. They might be from Columbia, Mexico, Spain .

L: Well there was one time a local radio station who made a comment on the air. And I called him and asked him why they would say it was a Puerto Rican. There was (--) Cumberland Farms on Merrimack Street was held up. I guess they gave the description that the person was Puerto Rican, but they didn't have this person you know, locked up, or they didn't have him in custody. So they, on the air they said the person was described as being Puerto Rican, and they went through the whole description of this person. So I called up the local radio station and I made a comment. I says, "Why are you people saying it's Puerto Rican when you don't even have this person on custody?" I says, "And furthermore, just because he looks Spanish that doesn't mean they're Puerto Ricans. They could be Colombians. They could be Dominicans. They could be Cubans. They could be Mexican. I know it's, if they said Hispanic then I would just be quiet. But saying it was Puerto Rican. And I didn't really follow it up afterwards, but I was very, very disturbed that they just said it was a Puerto Rican when they didn't know it was a Puerto Rican. This is why I get very upset when they start pointing us out, and sometimes it isn't so.

P: So it is a sort of (--) That's another way that prejudice develops against the Puerto Ricans. Especially in Lowell, I think the Puerto Ricans are usually to blame. People don't realize.

L: Right. Well when I came in 1956 there were only four Spanish families in Lowell. One of them had been here because the parents moved up here. But the other, their parents were in the service, the station where my father was stationed. There was no such thing as being discriminated, or anything. I mean I remember having all my American friends, and I had no problem, and we're talking going back in 1956. Then the Spanish community started growing like in 1965 or 66, and shortly after that, that's when, now we've had a few problems.

P: So what, what was happening in '60 (--) You were probably still pretty young then.

L: I was. Well not until... '65?

P: Yah.

L: No, I was ah (--)

P: No I don't want to [unclear].

L: No, I wouldn't tell. I am not going to tell you, but I was almost ready to graduate from Lowell High School.

P: So do you have some idea of what was happening in that time in a sense of what was causing the problems in Lowell?

L: I, not really. Well see, I was still in school. I wasn't very involved that much, but after I started working with the Spanish community in 1967, that's when we had our (--)
You know, I know we were discriminated against for various reasons. I mean (--)

P: But you didn't know it before then?

L: No, because I never had that kind of experience. I, you know like I said, I had a lot of friends, a lot, a lot of friends. My family, mother and father had a lot of dear friends too. I never felt this way until about maybe 8 or 9 years now. A little, well I should say maybe 10 or 12. You know, I didn't feel like that before. Now I mean sometimes you go places, and because of the color of my skin and stuff they just, sometimes they just look at you and say, they think you're from another world.

P: It's funny that you should say it like that.

L: They do!

P: I was talking to (--) I was interviewing a black man just last week and he said, "We could walk downtown everyday of the week and I'd never see a black face, and the people, white people would be looking at me as if I were from outer space or something."

L: Exactly. Now they, there are places you go and you just have this unwelcomed look.

P: You wouldn't think so, you know, today considering.

L: Sometimes there's other people they, since I speak English fluently and I dress well, you know, working in an office and stuff, he says "You're Spanish?" "Yes I'm Spanish!" You know there are kind of like shocked. I says, "And there's a lot of people like me you know who want to better themselves, and want to (--)" You know they just seem to think you know, the worst of us.

P: So it seems like the people need to be educated about (--)

L: Yah, you have to let them know. Well (--)

P: You know, think of how (--) Think of what they're doing with the Southeast Asians. Really, they're having an easier time.

L: Exactly

P: I can't get over (--) And that's why I like to compare the Southeast Asians with the Hispanics to see how they, how they develop. And Southeast Asians for some reason are, are just you know (--) True they don't have very good housing either, but they seem to have, the doors are open to them in a way that (--)

L: Absolutely. Absolutely. They have (--) There was an editorial sometime last year about the Indo, (P: Southeast Asians, Indochinese) the new immigrants coming in. And the comment that was made on it, he said, "Well they're not like the previous immigrants." We are not immigrants, but the previous immigrants. But I would, when I read it I got the understanding, you know, the Spanish were the ones before the Indochinese. And you know it was just putting us down again. And they're saying that the Indochinese, they're all coming here to Lowell, and they're making it in Lowell. They're finding their jobs and on, and on, and on. And, which is true, but what I'm saying, they were putting the (P: Yah, the Spanish), the Spanish.

P: Do you think it's (--) Do you think that this could be a color-kind of problem?

L: No I don't think so.

P: Because it doesn't, in some ways it doesn't make sense why the Spanish would be pointed.

L: Pointed out? (P: Yah, like this for so long) A lot of us said we're just going to have to prove ourselves. We are going to stay and we're going to prove ourselves that you know, we're going to be in Lowell and do our thing. We mind our business, we work and pay our taxes, and that's it.

P: Do you feel that the Lowell Sun is against certain (L: Groups?) [unclear] groups?

L: Yes, I would say so. Yes, very much. There's been a few times that there have been articles that haven't been that hot.

P: So your parents, did they, did they experience any of this and that's why they left?

L: No they, my parents, no, I would say no. They had a low profile. What they did, once my father retired in 1965 and started working for New Knit, they both worked at New Knit, and they would go to work and home, and that was the end of it. You know, there was (--)

P: At New Knit were there other Spanish people there?

L: There was a few. A few, maybe one or two, or maybe more. (P: Unclear) When I worked there one summer when I was in school there weren't that many.

P: How many people worked there though, total?

L: Total, I really couldn't tell you. I know I just worked in one area. It was kind of, the plant was pretty big. But after, that was in 1964 that I worked that summer, but after that I believed there were a lot of Spanish people working there.

P: So your parents just decided to (--)

L: No, they had bought a house. When he retired they had gone back to Puerto Rico to visit. They were having this new development, building new houses there. And my father decided to buy one. And what he did, he rented it out. In 1979 he asked them to vacate the apartment, the house and he moved in. Then he took all his furniture in his car. So they're living very well over there. He's got his army pension and his social security, and my mother has her social security and they do very well. They have no heating bills. They have privileges to go on base and buy things much cheaper. So they live very well. As a matter of fact they were here last month. They visited me and they stayed three weeks. They liked it. They said, "I'd like to come back to Lowell and live." I said, "No, stay over there, because you know the apartments here are very, very expensive. And you know, you have your own house over there. I would stay over there, and not (--)"

P: Yah. Now why are some Hispanics, are they still coming to Lowell now?

L: Not as much as before. We used to get a lot of them directly from Puerto Rico, you know, but lately the people that, the newer Hispanics, Puerto Ricans that I've seen, they're mostly from Connecticut and New York. But at one time they were all mostly coming from the island.

P: Why has that stopped? You're not sure.

L: I really, I really don't know. Like I said, it probably could be brother and sisters who live over there, and they just come over here to visit their family. They like Lowell and they stay.

P: But people aren't coming over as much.

L: Not as much. I would say that, not as much. Like between 1967 or 66, until about 1975 or so, there was a lot of them coming in from the island. And they, a lot of them work at the shoe shop and New Knit, the Prince Packaging, a lot of factories around Lowell. I think that's what attracted a lot of them. They knew there was a lot of employment here.

P: Did they come over with a knowledge of English or did they have to learn it here?

L: Some of them had a little English background, but a lot of them didn't. I think that's why there were some with even high school diplomas, and they just couldn't find a job because of the language. And if they did they probably you know, working in the sweat shops, shoe shops, and places like that.

P: So do you feel that the city helps Spanish people when they come in?

L: In what (--) What do you mean? You say the city?

P: Well maybe I shouldn't just say the city, but even the state in helping them to resettle.

L: No, I think most of the work is done through their own family, looking for apartments, looking for a job.

P: How about learning English though?

L: Learning English? When I was at the Institute I always encouraged them to take English as a Second Language there at the high school. And a couple, we had a couple of times courses at the International Institute during the day. So if the person couldn't go in the evening they would be able to go at least to the Institute during the day. And I always encouraged them, you know, better yourselves. Try and go to school and learn little more. But that's one thing that I can say, that the parent, the children that these people brought, let's say 14 years, 15 years ago they were children, and now they're like 18, 19, the majority I'm glad to say that they're all pursuing college.

P: College here at this Lowell (--)

L: Here in Lowell, Amherst. I feel very happy. Like my nephew just graduated from Lowell High on June 4th, and I couldn't believe all of the Hispanics that graduated. I mean when I graduated in '67 I was the only Hispanic person. I remember that there was one Cuban. I was the only Puerto Rican and there was one Cuban that graduated in 1967 from Lowell High. In the past two weeks when I went to their graduation I couldn't believe there must have been at least 30 or 35.

P: How many Hispanic families do you think there are in Lowell now?

L: Well I left the Institute at 1982, and they were saying we had between ten and twelve thousand. And I mean I haven't really followed it up. It could be more.

P: Now you belong to the Catholic Church? (L: That's correct) Did your parents bring you to church every (--)

L: Every Sunday. And it's like once (--) Now that I live in this area, I visit Sacred Heart and St. Jean the Baptiste, since my children go to St. Joe's Elementary School I attend that mass.

P: I noticed St. Jean the Baptiste, that a lot of Hispanic people go to that church.

L: Umhm, they have a mass in Spanish that's why.

P: Even though, but I go to the (--) But I don't, I don't go to church as much, but when I did I would go there, because I used to work at St. Joseph's Hospital. So I would go over there. And I went to an English mass. And I said it's mostly wherever [unclear].

L: The train.

P: Oh, the train again, yah. Actually you do get used to it.

L: Oh yah, you do.

P: Of course not the rumbling. [Both laugh] I noticed that a lot of Hispanics went to the church there. So I said, "Where are all these Hispanics living?" You know what I mean? Because that, around St. Jean the Baptiste, the only real housing, well I mean there are some housing that I, on Market Street but there isn't that much on Merrimack Street itself.

L: No, at one time Moody Street way up where they made like a medical building, there were two big, big apartment house there. I think that the landlord was Lemire. I don't know her first name, but they must have, I think one apartment house had about maybe 30 or 40 apartments. They took like maybe a whole block. That's where the Hispanics lived in 1967.

Tape I, side A ends
Tape I, side B begins

P: So you're saying that a lot of the Spanish people were all over the city.

L: Now there's, you know, there's some in the Acre. Like I said, some in Belvidere, the Highlands, South Lowell.

P: Where do the newest groups come in to stay?

L: I really couldn't tell you. Like I said, I'm still involved with the Spanish community but since I work in Methuen I really don't.

P: With the church, did, would say a lot of your early, your childhood and early life center around the church, or was it more around the family, or someplace else?

L: Around, I would say around the family. We were very family orientated. We were a very close family. It was only my brother and I, and my mother and father.

P: What did you do together as a family? Did you go on vacations, or just all days?

L: We'd go on vacations. We really didn't go to places too far. Like to the beach would be the furthest place we would visit. I think my father most of the time he'd just work like six days a week and Sundays to church, and come home and have a meal. Sometime we'd just take a ride, but nothing. And like not every year, but every three or four years they would take us down back home to the island and visit our relatives.

P: As far as meals are concerned, were there special, special meals, or favorite?

L: No. Between 1956 and say 1965, I would say until 1965 you really couldn't find any Spanish products around here. I mean very scarce. We could not find them. And then in 1967 or so, they opened a Spanish grocery store. Now there is about six or seven of them, or maybe more. You know now any Spanish product you need you can walk in these stores now and get them, but at that time you couldn't find them.

P: So do you find yourself buying Spanish products now?

L: I do because my husband does like his rice and beans (Laughs). He likes rice and beans so I make it for him, and the Spanish vegetables.

P: What are they?

L: Well there's (sounds like) blackanos. There's the green bananas that we eat, that we boil, and then a few other vegetables that we boil. And we prepare it with sardines, or we could prepare it with pork.

P: Oh. I guess you were saying that your parents came from Puerto Rico.

L: Three weeks ago.

P: No, originally? Were your parents the first people to come from Puerto Rico?

L: Well they were, it was my father and there were three other servicemen that were Spanish, that were sent from wherever they were in Puerto Rico. They were sent to Fort Devens. Then from Fort Devens, since my father's job was mostly with missiles, they transferred him to Bedford, someplace in Bedford where they would keep these missiles. That's why you know, it was a short drive from like from Bedford to Lowell. So he was in Fort Devens, and then to Bedford, but we still lived in Lowell. We didn't move.

P: Was he in World War II?

L: My father was in World War II. He was in the Korean War. I know he was in three wars. I don't know the third. I can't remember. He was in three wars.

P: And your husband was in Vietnam?

L: My husband was in the service three years, from 1968 to 1970.

P: Was he hurt?

L: No, thank God. He came back the same way he went.

P: That was a short tour of duty.

L: Three years. Well like sometimes he thinks, he says, "Gee, I should have stayed." He says, "If I had stayed, he says, I'd have one more year and I would be retiring and have my pension." But at that time things were so tense in Vietnam that he didn't want to take a chance. He extended his tour in Vietnam. He was there fifteen months. He said it was really terrible. And he says, "I would like to re-enlist, but there is a chance that they might send me back to Vietnam. And I mean I was lucky the first time, I don't know if I'll be lucky the second time. So I'm going to get out." And he did.

P: Did he feel that the war in Vietnam was being fought by minority groups?

L: No. He never (--) That is something that he doesn't bring up. Sometimes he just looks at these movies and stuff, and says, "Oh, that looks like where I was." But he doesn't say much.

P: So you're still raising your children in Catholic type?

L: That's right. I have three children. I have a boy and two girls. I have them in Catholic schools, and a Catholic home.

P: You went to Lowell High School? (L: That's right) Did you go to a public school or a catholic school?

L: I went to a public school all of my life. I attended the Lincoln School on Chelmsford Street. Then when I graduated from sixth grade we were transferred over. I went to the Daley school. Then since my parents moved from the Highlands to the Belvidere area, no, was it (--) No, when we moved from Chelmsford Street to Hale Street, because of the way that had it zoned I had to attend the Butler School here on Gorham Street. So I graduated in 1964 from the Butler School here on Gorham Street. Then in '67, like I said before, from Lowell High. But I went to public schools. But now I see so many things happening you know, with drugs and stuff, I get nervous. And I feel that having them in a Catholic school there's more supervision and you know. Teachers are more involved with the students. I am very sure they would contact the parents if there's any kind of problems. And the classes, I think the classes are much smaller. I just feel satisfied that they are in private schools. I hope to send them through all their years until they graduate from high school. And if God gives me health, I'll continue to work and send them through college.

P: So you're thinking they have plans of going to college?

L: Oh yah. My son wants to be a doctor. That's the oldest. My daughter wants to be a teacher. And the little one, she was funny. She says she wanted to be a street lady. I said, "What do you mean street lady?" She says she wants to direct traffic. She wants to be a policewoman. She said "a street lady." I said. "What!" (Laughs). That was like three years ago. She was like six years old. She didn't know what (--) Now she says she would like to be a policewoman. Like my nephew, you're doing this on me, but my nephew just graduated June 4th, he is going to Middlesex Community College and he wants to be a state trooper. I hope that someday he accomplishes that too.

P: Especially when you get flagged down on the highway.

L: Yah, its only my nephew. So this is what I (--)

P: What kind of job does your husband do?

L: He works in Raytheon in Lowell. He's a shipper and receiver.

P: Do you have other family who are living in (--)

L: Just my brother. He lives next door. He bought that house about four years ago. So it's only him and I. My husband's side of the family is very large. He comes from a family of eleven. There were twelve, but one of them got killed in a car accident. So there's eleven, but on my side it is only him and I.

P: Just getting back to that Spanish Social Club was it?

L: The Spanish American Center?

P: What kind of work would you do there that would be different from the International Institute?

L: Well when I worked there I worked under this program. It was CTI who you know, paid our salary. It was called the CEP, Concentrated Employment Program. What we did was tried to place people in jobs. My job there was to answer the phone, light bookkeeping and just a little clerical, it was mostly clerical work. When that program, when the funds ran out, that's when I (--) Well at that time they hadn't run out, but I knew it was going to happen so I looked for another job. That's when I went to the Institute. While I was at the Institute a few times I made presentations. We had speakers like from Lowell General Hospital give movies about your health, different health problems, and how to care for them.

P: What kind of health problems do the Hispanics have when they come here?

L: I would say you know, the climate, because of the change in climate they get a lot of colds, and odds and ends. But the movies that we presented at the institute was mostly like about cancer, and what are the signs, and educate them a little about it.

P: I imagine there is cancer too though in Puerto Rico.

L: Oh in Puerto Rico, definitely. Definitely, it's everywhere. Like I said, we gave those movies out, and we just wanted to let them know what are the signs. If they needed any help who to contact at the hospital. They had, and they still do, bilingual persons there working, and the same with the Institute.

P: How was it? Did you have a hard time buying this house here?

L: Not at all, not at all. We were looking for an apartment. We lived at the Northern Canal Apartments for awhile when they were first built, and they're right behind city hall. (P: Yah, that's St. Jean Baptiste) That's correct. We had to wait for an apartment. It wasn't even ready. We lived there and we lived at the Camelot Court, PB. Then the rent started going up a little more. So I said, well we better find a better place. That's when I was looking for that house that I was turned down. And then finally I found an apartment, but the apartment was like too many kids in the apartment. It was a three tenement. And I said to my husband, "I don't know, but I'd like to go somewhere where it's peace and quiet." I says "Every time the kids go downstairs and play they all come up bruised." And they say, "So and so hit me." And I said, "I can't take this. I want to look for something." So I picked up the phone and I started calling different real estate agencies. I finally contacted Ross Real Estate which is on Middlesex Street, and I said, "I'm looking for an apartment or a house." He said, "Gee, I have a house that I want to sell. But if I don't sell it, I'll call you and you can come to look at it, and maybe you can move in with option to buy." I says, "Oh that sounds great." So, like I said, "This is another one that is going to put me on hold and I'm not going to here anything." But thank God, like a week later, he called and said, "Mrs. Rivera do you want to see the house?" I said, "Definitely." So we came down and we looked at the place. And I said, "We'll take it." We were living here almost a year when we found out that the people weren't paying. I mean they would collect the rent, this agency, but I think they must give, turn the money over to the owner of the house, and I guess they weren't paying the bank. This house was going to be foreclosed. So I says, "Oh, oh." He came down and talked to us. He said, "Well since you people live in the house you have the first option" He says, "If you give me \$500 we'll," you know, we went through the whole thing. He says, "That will, I'll draw up an agreement." I says, "Fine." That's what we did. The house was auctioned off eventually, but the person who won the bid turned around and sold it to us, because they just did us a favor. You know since we couldn't bid on it because we were in the process of buying the house and we had gone through the bank and everything. And they said if we bid on it all of that paperwork would just be (--)

P: So in other words, you could have actually lost the house?

L: Oh definitely. They said you can't bid on it. If you bid on that house you can you know, this sale, this transaction here at the bank will just be put aside.

P: Why didn't the bank hold it for you?

L: Because when you go through the V.A. you know, there's so many things that they check out which is good. You know they make sure you are not getting ripped off. They make sure that you don't have termites. Make sure on a lot of things that you're getting your money's worth. Then all the paper work and stuff. We only had three weeks. And you really don't, no bank will pass papers in three weeks. You have, you know, your verifications and everything. It does take a little time. But thank God everything went just fine. We bought the house.

P: How much did the house auction off for?

L: I really don't know the exact price. I know that we ended up paying \$28,000. I mean a steal. Right now this house is (--)

P: Yah, you have to pay that much for a month, a month's rent. Just kidding, but that's about how bad it is.

L: Right now you couldn't (--) This house is well worth over a hundred thousand. But I am very thankful that we were able to buy a house when we did. I mean it's a big house. The kids are very happy. The neighborhood is a very nice neighborhood. It's not a fancy neighborhood, but I'm very happy, nobody bothers us, and we don't bother anybody. As you know, there is a factory right across the street, which is Prince Packaging. Mr. Pellegrino keeps that place very neat, very clean. He has all these landscapers coming in keeping the place really nice. So I'm very happy here, and I love Lowell very much.

P: Why do you love Lowell? I have to ask the question [unclear].

L: I don't know. I feel like this is part of me. I've been here so long that (--) My husband says, "Oh let's move to Florida. I would like to move to Florida someday. I'd like to move home, back to Puerto Rico someday." I said, "Well you can go by yourself, because I'm happy here where I am." I said, "I like my four seasons, I am happy with my job, and I says, I'm content that's all."

P: What do you hope that the Spanish people will be able to do in Lowell in the future?

L: The same thing that we did. Perhaps buy their houses and build their lives here.

P: What kind of action (--) What will it take though to turn around the public opinion?

L: What do you mean?

P: Let's say there is a prejudice against the Hispanics, what (--)

L: We just won't take no for an answer. We'll just, you know, we'll just have to go wherever we have to go and just get it done.

P: Do you belong to any social clubs?

L: No. I'm a board member at the International Institute, and I'm a board member at UNITAS. That's where Dalia called you.

P: That's right. Yah. You know I called Dalia. I said, "I'm looking for people who have been in the city for awhile." She said, "Oh God, that's going to be hard to find." Now I can see why. I mean in other words, you're probably one of the longest, the oldest."

L: I would consider myself, and there's another girl, she works at the University of Lowell. Her name is Julie Slates. I think she was here like maybe a few months before I was. But like I said, there was only about four families and we've kept close contact with each another, because we were the only ones. And when sometime when I talk to you about this discrimination, nothing like that existed at that time. We were all one big family, one big family. I mean we were always welcomed everywhere, everywhere.

P: How did you get to know the four families?

L: Well they were stationed in the service with my father. They told him where they lived and we just visited each other. At Christmastime, Thanksgiving we would all get together.

P: What holiday is most important to you?

L: I would say Christmas, very important day in Puerto Rico. And the 24th is a celebration too. The 24th is a big celebration, and Christmas day is.

P: Would you have parties on Christmas Day, or would it be quiet?

L: No, usually (--) Christmas Day is kind of a little on the quiet side. But the 24th they have a big, big party.

P: I don't know if you, you might not know this, but I was just wondering if a lot of people, a lot of Spanish people your father's age were in the service?

L: I would say there was. I would say there was.

P: The only reason I say this was that the blacks were having a hard time getting in the service during the Second World War. So I was wondering if the Spanish were experiencing the same kind of discrimination.

L: I really could not say.

P: I was thinking about whether you were involved in any sort of sports when you were younger?

L: Well when I was in school that was one of my favorite class was gym, because we played basketball, volleyball. We would have races and stuff. I really, really enjoyed it. But after you get married and have kids, I don't know, some people might have the energy, I don't. I mean I feel that working eight hours and then coming home and taking care of the family is enough exercise for me right now. But I have a bike and once in a while I'll go out and ride a bike.

P: How did you get your job at Wang?

L: Well I put in an application with my resume, and they called me in for an interview. And a week later I was notified that I had the job.

P: As a personnel?

L: I started, it was mostly like a receptionist, secretarial job. Then when my predecessor left, she left that position available and I bid on it, and I got it. And I enjoy my job there very much.

P: Now I noticed you don't have a college degree. (L: No I don't) I don't (--) I'm not, you know, all I was wondering if that affects, affects any of your, you know, your chances for (--)

L: I, I would say yes and no. I, how can I say it, I intend to go back to school someday. I can't do it now because my kids are still small. And like I say, once they become a little more independent I would like to go back to school. But right now, like I say, I'm happy with my job. Perhaps if I want to get into a better paying position, you know, you will need a little more schooling here and there. So I would like to do that.

P: Well I think I've asked you all the questions I can think of. You know I hate to (--) I have this feeling, I have this feeling in the back of my mind that somehow I haven't asked the right questions, and that I'm going to find these questions. I'm going to say, "Oh my God, why didn't I ask this question?" But I think all in all, like I said, I think we've covered most of the things that I have in mind right now. So maybe if there are more questions afterwards (--)

L: You are welcome to call.

P: Okay, I can come back. All right, I'll just shut off the tape then.

Tape is turned off, then on again.

P: So could you tell me something about your social life there playing whatever, bingo?

L: I enjoy bingo very much. That's one of my hobbies. I enjoy bingo very much. One time I had a problem at the beano. I was going into the parking lot to park, and the parking attendant told me that I had to back, back up my car and get a little closer to the other car because there were going to be more cars being parked in that parking lot. So I said, "Okay." So I goes into the bingo after the beano. I proceeded to my car. A when I was getting into my car, a lady getting into her car which was right next door to mine, and she made a comment. And my sister-in-law heard it and she didn't like it because it was discriminating against the Hispanics. So I got out of the car and confronted the girl. And I says, "What was her problem?" I says, "If she has something to say, she should say it to my face and not mumble or words, or say it behind my back." So the lady opened the window a little bit and told me to go back to Adams Street. And I told the lady, I said, "You happen to be very much mistaken, because I do not live on Adams Street. I live down the street from here." She continued to talk and then I said, "And like I say, you don't have to say it inside that van, you can come out here and confront me if you want." So she opened the window again and she said, "Well that's all welfare talk." And I said, "Well that's, you know, that's a big lie too." I said, "I work for a living." So I was very, very upset with that woman, and I told that I did not want to see her face again, because I was very upset with her. I said this would result in a (P: Serious bodily injuries) a serious problem, because she was really pushing me. So come to find out, the girl had worked at the concession stand at the bingo. The following week I went in to see the president of the Men's Club. And I told him, I said, "Listen, I only go out once a week on Tuesdays to my bingo, and I enjoy my bingo very much. I don't come here to look for any problems with anybody, and I don't expect anybody to look for problems with me." I said, "You had a lady who worked at the concession stand that was being very rude and discriminatory against me." He asked me what the name of the person was. I says, "I don't know her name and I really don't want to know her name, but I think that you should talk to her, because I says, I don't want to see that woman around here because she's going to have serious problems, not only with me, with a lot of people." Because you know, a lot of Hispanics go to the bingos too. So the man was very nice to me, the president of the Men's Club. He went up, he found out who the name of the person, the name of the person that caused all that problem, and he fired her. And he came back to me and he apologized. And he said that one thing he was not going to tolerate was this kind of discrimination at his bingo. I thanked him for doing what he did. Because what this lady did was uncalled for. There was no reason for it. I mean she just saw that I was Spanish and she started mumbling all of these things. This is a perfect example you know, how you can get discriminated against. I mean I wasn't looking for any problems with anybody, but she just saw that I was Spanish and I was perhaps, you know, I was talking Spanish to my sister-in-law. And that's probably why she got all bent out of shape. And she just told me to go back to Adams Street. And go to, that it was all welfare talk. I mean those things kind of really bother you, especially when it isn't true.

P: Do your children experience the same kind of discrimination today? Do they ever talk about it?

L: My children, they don't. They don't talk about it. And I hope they don't go through what's happening now with, you know with us. I mean I didn't experience this fifteen years ago or so. It didn't happen. Now it is.

P: Do they speak Spanish?

L: They don't speak Spanish, but they understand it. They say a few words. They speak English fluently, but Spanish just a few words. They understand everything you say.

P: So it's the (--) Did you never (--) You didn't teach them when they were younger?

L: Well we speak it in the house. We shouldn't. We should speak Spanish here. So even though we speak, my husband and I we speak Spanish once in a while, but the kids, we always speak to them in English.

P: And your parents? Well your parents had to speak English.

L: My father did. And my mother, we would speak English to her, but she would respond in Spanish. So that is the way we (--)

P: Okay.

Interview ends